

A
S E R M O N
ON THE
ORIGIN OF FAITH.

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

81



A

18

S E R M O N
ON THE
ORIGIN OF FAITH.

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
AT ST. PETER'S, OCT. 28, 1761.

By JOHN ROTHERAM, M.A.
FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, AND ONE OF
THE PREACHERS AT HIS MAJESTY'S CHAPEL AT
WHITEHALL.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE VICE-
CHANCELLOR AND HEADS OF HOUSES.

THE SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N :

Printed for W. Sandby, at the Ship opposite St. Dunstan's
Church in Fleet-Street; and sold by Dan. Prince, in
Oxford. 1763.

2 E R M O N

1812

1812



v
P
v
l
v

a
u
o
a

JOHN X. 37, 38.

If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.

IF we would understand the true ORIGIN OF FAITH, we must have recourse to the great Author and Finisher of it.

By what means then did our Saviour, by what means did his Apostles, originally implant faith in the minds of the first converts? did they implant it? or, did they leave it to be produced entirely by the inward operation of the Holy Spirit?

These are enquiries which the Gospel alone can answer. In the passage before us, our Lord clearly makes faith dependent on the testimony of his miracles. "If he
" did the works of his Father, he tells the
B " Jews,

“ Jews, that they ought to believe those
 “ works.” On no other supposition does
 he require their belief in him. “ If he
 “ did not the works of his Father, he
 “ leaves them at full liberty to reject his
 “ claim, and to withdraw their belief;”
 contented that their faith should stand or
 fall, as it should appear to be supported
 by this kind of evidence, or to want that
 support.

It is not on this occasion alone that our
 Saviour lays this ground of faith: we find
 it every where resting on the same founda-
 tion. His addresses to the understanding,
 his application of argument and reasoning,
 his appeals to external evidence, abound in
 all his discourses, and meet us in every part
 of his history. The instances of this kind
 are too numerous to be fully recited, much
 less to be insisted and enlarged upon as their
 importance deserves. The time will only
 permit me to lay before you a recapitulation
 of what hath been extracted from the evan-
 gelical writings to our purpose; and to give
 you, in general, the result of a careful and
 attentive perusal of the gospels, and the hi-
 story

story of the apostolical labours. This I shall do in the first place; and then shall attempt to raise such reflections upon the whole, as I hope may throw some light on this important subject.

In the first place then, we are expressly told, that the design of our Lord's forerunner was "to prepare the way of the Lord;" to dispose the hearts of men for that purer dispensation which was now to take place, and to turn their attention towards that great personage who was about to arise. "He came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe." By his attestation, and by the many extraordinary circumstances in his birth and ministry, he introduced and opened out the evidence for the divine mission of our Lord.

The peculiar force of John's testimony lay in its being prophetic. Every common beholder could own our Lord to be

B 2

the

the Messiah, after they had seen his miracles. But John bare witness to him before he had given any proofs of a divine power. It was his part to close the prophetical evidence of our Lord's divine mission. "He" "was a Prophet:" but he was at the same time "more than a Prophet." It was his great office to introduce that new dispensation which the other Prophets had only foretold. This peculiar situation gave occasion to a remarkable difference in the manner of confirming their testimony. All the antient Prophets were at a great distance from the grand object which they foretold. Hence it was necessary that they should be enabled to confirm their prophecies, and to procure them credit amongst their contemporaries, by miracles, or by some collateral prophecy which received a speedy accomplishment. But the language of the Baptist was, "Behold the Lamb of God:" "There standeth one among you who is greater than I." John therefore, as we read, "did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true." His testimony to the character of our Lord was verified by
the

the event; and his predictions were supported, not by any miracles of his own, but by the personal appearance, and the miracles of our Lord himself*.

B 3

But

* What hath been here observed concerning the nature of the Baptist's testimony, will lead us to understand the design and the propriety of that message which he sent to our Lord by his disciples. Having finished the business of his own mission, in order to instruct his disciples that they were now to seek from the Lamb of God himself, the accomplishment of that testimony which he had borne of him, he sent two of them to our Lord, to enquire whether he claimed the character of the promised Messiah or not, and what proof he could give of his title to it. In answer to which our Lord said unto them, "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them." This answer is a clear reference to a signal^b prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Messiah; and therefore it is manifest that he referred the enquirers for their conviction at once to the evidence of prophecies and miracles. The finger of God is manifest in this whole occurrence. It could not be by chance that John sent his disciples to propose this important question to our Lord at the very time when he was enabled to give the fullest satisfaction to it, and to confirm in so remarkable a manner the testimony of the Baptist. It could not be by chance that the enquiry after his divine character was made at that critical period when he was displaying the strongest

^b Isaiah lxi. See also Luke iv. 18.

But let us pass on to consider our Lord's conduct and personal declarations on this subject.

The

strongest marks of it ; in that " same hour " when he was engaged in " curing many of their infirmities and " plagues, and of evil spirits, and in giving sight to " many that were born blind."

We see clearly then the propriety of this enquiry, without deducing it from any supposed doubts or discontent in the mind of the Baptist himself, or even any incredulity in his disciples. John had frequently declared our Lord to be the Messiah, which was indeed the grand purpose of his own mission. But without his doubting, or his disciples disbelieving, this testimony, they must all alike have been sensible, that this testimony could have no force till it should be confirmed by the event; and till our Lord should prove himself to be what John had asserted him to be. The prophets had described the Messiah. John had pointed out our Saviour to the world as the person by them described. His testimony, therefore, must have been overthrown, had it not afterwards appeared that " all things that John spake of " this man were true." Hence it was natural, nay, it was necessary, that he should send his disciples to our Lord, that they might see the prophetic descriptions of the Messiah, and the testimony of their Master, verified in him. And when now the business of his own mission was accomplished, when his doctrine and his testimony of our Lord's divine character had made their due impression upon the people ; when the report of the " mighty works of Christ " had reached him " in " prison," and he perceived that our Saviour began to display that divine power which the prophets had ascribed to the Messiah, he then saw that this was the season

The Evangelist does not neglect the very first occasion of teaching us the true design, and telling us the genuine effect of our Lord's miracles. On the "beginning of miracles" which Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, he remarks, that he thereby "manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him."

Our Saviour reproaches, in the severest terms, those cities, which had been witnesses of his mighty works without being converted by them. "Wo unto thee, Chozazin; wo unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you,

B 4

" they

season pointed out to him by Providence for sending his disciples to make this enquiry.

I gladly embrace this opportunity of acknowledging the pleasure I have received from the perusal of "An Enquiry into the Divine Missions of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ," by the ingenious Mr. BELL, and of referring my readers to it: where they will find the argument for the truth of Christianity arising from the several extraordinary circumstances in the birth and ministry of the Baptist, as they stand connected with the history of our Lord, drawn out with a masterly hand.

* John ii. 11. . ^d Mat. xi. 21.

“ they had a great while ago repented ; sit-
 “ ting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall
 “ be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at
 “ the judgment than for you.”

His displeasure against those who had re-
 sisted the clearest evidence, is expressed in
 terms the strongest and most awakening that
 can be imagined. “ * Wherefore I say unto
 “ you, all manner of sin and blasphemy
 “ shall be forgiven unto man, but the blas-
 “ phemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be
 “ forgiven unto man.”

Our Lord appeals to the prophetic evi-
 dence of the antient scriptures for the con-
 viction of the Jews. “ † Search the scrip-
 “ tures, says he, for in them ye think ye
 “ have eternal life : and they are they which
 “ testify of me. Had ye believed Moses,
 “ ye would have believed me : for he wrote
 “ of me. But if ye believe not his writings,
 “ how shall ye believe my words ?”

When

* Mat. xii. 31.

† John v. 39 and 46.

When the Jews called upon him for an open and explicit declaration, whether he was the Messiah or not, he replies, that his miracles speak for him, and decide this matter more clearly than any words of his own could do. “^g Jesus walked in the temple, “ in Solomon’s porch. Then came the “ Jews round about him, and said unto him, “ how long dost thou make us to doubt? “ if thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Je- “ sus answered them; I told you, and ye “ believed not. The works that I do in “ my Father’s name, they bear witness of “ me.”

Often does he press upon them the same evidence, in proof of his divine mission, as of irresistible force. “^h If I do not the “ works of my Father, believe me not. “ But if I do, though ye believe not me, “ believe the works. ⁱ Believe me that I “ am in the Father. and the Father in me: “ or else believe me for the very works sake. “^k If I had not done among them the “ works

^g John x. 24, 25. ^h Ib. 37, 38. ⁱ John xiv. 11.
^k John xv. 24.

“ works which none other man did, they
 “ had not had sin. ¹ I have greater witness
 “ than that of John : for the works which
 “ the Father hath given me to finish, the
 “ same works that I do, bear witness of me,
 “ that my Father hath sent me.”

The sense which the people had of
 this evidence, appears in many instances.
 “ ^m When he was in Jerusalem at the pass-
 “ over, in the feast-day, many believed in
 “ his name when they saw the miracles
 “ which he did. ⁿ Rabbi, said Nicodemus,
 “ we know that thou art a teacher come
 “ from God ; for no man can do these mi-
 “ racles that thou doest, except God be with
 “ him. ^o Come, said the woman of Sa-
 “ maria, come see a man which told me all
 “ the things that ever I did : is not this the
 “ Christ ? And many of the Samaritans of
 “ that city believed on him, for the saying
 “ of the woman—And many more be-
 “ lieved because of his own word ; and said
 “ unto the woman, now we believe, not be-
 “ cause

ⁱ John v. 36.
^o John iii. 41, &c.

^m John ii. 23.

ⁿ John iii. 2.

“ cause of thy saying : for we have heard
 “ him ourselves, and know that this is in-
 “ deed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”
 After the miracle of feeding the multitude
 with five barley-loaves and two small fishes,
 we are told, “ ^p Then those men, when
 “ they had seen the miracle which Jesus
 “ did, said, this is of a truth that Prophet
 “ that should come into the world.” And
 on another occasion, “ ^q Many of the peo-
 “ ple believed on him, and said, when
 “ Christ cometh, will he do greater mira-
 “ cles than those which this man hath
 “ done?”

The reasoning of the man born blind is
 equally just and spirited. “ ^r Herein,” said
 he to the Pharisees, “ is a marvellous thing,
 “ that ye know not whence he is, and yet
 “ he hath opened mine eyes. Now we
 “ know that God heareth not sinners : but
 “ if any man be a worshipper of God, and
 “ doeth his will, him he heareth. Since
 “ the world began was it not heard, that
 “ any man opened the eyes of one that was
 “ born

^p John vi. 14.
30, &c.

^q John vii. 31.

^r John ix.

“ born blind. If this man were not of God,
 “ he could do nothing *.”

Upon

* The introduction to this miracle hath occasioned some difficulty. “ The disciples asked him, saying, “ Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that “ he was born blind?” This question hath been generally supposed to imply a prepossession in favour of the doctrine of a pre-existent state of souls. But it does not seem likely, that the apostles should introduce a doctrine, of which there are no traces either in the Old or New Testament; still less likely, that our Lord should pass by so singular a doctrine, without any direct answer, or refutation.

There is another opinion with which the later Jews were deeply infected, and which may have left some scruples in the minds of the apostles. I mean the opinion which the Jews entertained under their captivity, and in the calamitous times that followed, that all their sufferings descended upon them from the crimes of their fathers, and were wholly unmerited on their own part. This opinion it was that drew from the pen of Ezekiel that severe remonstrance and animated vindication of the ways of providence, contained in the eighteenth chapter of his prophecy. Some remains of this opinion may still have possessed the minds of the apostles, full as they were at that time of all Jewish prejudices. They fancied they saw in the man born blind a case that could not be accounted for but by supposing him to suffer for a parent's guilt. “ Master, who did sin, “ this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The question they thought admitted but of one reply. “ The crime must precede the punishment. The punishment in this case commences before there could “ be any personal guilt in the sufferer. It must therefore descend from the parents sins.” But our Lord shewed

Upon more occasions than one does our Lord openly avow the design of his miracles at the very time of working them. As in the great miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead^s. He declared to his disciples, that the sickness and death of Lazarus were only permitted by heaven for the sake of that glorious proof of divine power that he was about to give. "This sickness," said he, "is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." And again, "I am glad, for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." Nay, to remove all doubt as to the intention of the miracle, immediately before the powerful word was pronounced, which the dead man heard in his

shewed them, that the case admitted of a very different solution. "Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." "Suffering is not in this instance the effect of sin. This is a peculiar case; an exception from the ordinary course of God's Providence. This private calamity is permitted for a public good: to give me an opportunity of displaying to the world that divine power by which I act."

• John xi.

his tomb and came forth, he declared before all the people, “ because of the people “ which stand by I said it, that they may “ believe that thou hast sent me.” The effect was answerable, “ for many of the “ Jews which came to Mary, and had seen “ the things which Jesus did, believed on “ him.” Nay, the Jewish council themselves, blinded as they were, could not help seeing the natural consequence of miracles like these, and were greatly alarmed. “ What do we,” said they in deep deliberation amongst themselves, “ for this “ man doeth many miracles. If we let “ him thus alone, all men will believe on “ him.” And again, “ the chief priests “ consulted that they might put Lazarus “ also to death, because that by reason of “ him many of the Jews went away, and “ believed on Jesus.”

To carry on the same design it was that our Lord appointed his Apostles. “ ^t And “ ye also shall bear witness,” said he, “ because ye have been with me from the beginning.”

^t John xv. 27.

“ginning.” His parting words just before his ascension again reminded them of the end of their institution. “^u Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” And thus from heaven he declares his commission to St. Paul. “^w I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.”

This is the character which the apostles upon all occasions claim to themselves. Matthias was chosen into the number of the apostles, that he might be “^x a witness with them” of the resurrection of Jesus. This was their declaration before the council of the Jews; “^y We are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” When Peter unfolds the gospel to Cornelius, he tells him, “^z We
“ are

^u Acts i. 1.
^y Acts v. 32.

^w Acts xxvi. 16.
^z Acts x. 39.

^x Acts i. 22.

“ are witnesses of all things which he did
 “ both in the land of the Jews, and in
 “ Jerusalem.” And then he continues;
 “ Him God raised up the third day, and
 “ shewed him openly, not to all the people,
 “ but unto witnesses chosen before of God,
 “ even to us.” To the same purpose Paul
 speaks in the synagogue at Antioch. “ ^a He
 “ was seen many days of them which came
 “ up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem,
 “ who are his witnesses unto the people.”
 And of himself he says, “ ^b having there-
 “ fore obtained help of God, I continue
 “ unto this day, witnessing both to small and
 “ great.”

We find this character of witnesses sus-
 tained not only by the declarations of the
 apostles, but by their practice. It was by
 the power of evidence that they undertook
 the conversion of the world. “ ^c With
 “ great power gave the apostles witness of
 “ the resurrection of Jesus.” This is ma-
 nifest

^a Acts xiii. 31.
 iv. 33.

^b Acts xvvi. 22.

^c Acts

nifest throughout the whole course of their ministry ; from the first effusion of the Holy Ghost, through all the history of their private and separate labours.

It was from the visible effects of that power from on high shed forth on the apostles at the feast of Pentecost, that St. Peter drew this conclusion, “^d Therefore, “ let all the house of Israel know assuredly, “ that God hath made that same Jesus “ whom ye have crucified, both Lord and “ Christ.” By the force of this evidence, explained and urged home by the apostle, three thousand souls were converted. By the next ^e public miracle of healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, the number of converts was encreased to five thousand. It was in consequence of ^f many signs and wonders wrought by the hands of the apostles, that “ believers were the more “ added to the Lord, multitudes both of “ men and women.”

C

If

^d Acts ii. 36.
12, 14.

^e Acts iii. iv. 4.

^f Acts v.

If we attend still farther the progress of the word of God, and behold “^g the number of the disciples multiplying in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests obedient to the faith ;” we see at the same time “ Stephen full of faith and power, doing great wonders and miracles among the people.”

When the disciples, providentially “ scattered abroad” by the first persecution at Jerusalem, “^h went every where preaching the word,” along with the word they carried its evidence. “ⁱ The hand of the Lord was with them,” wherever they went, “ and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” Philip preached Christ in Samaria, and the inhabitants with one accord “ gave heed unto those things which he spake, but it was because^k they heard and saw the miracles which he did.”

We

^g Acts vi. 7, 8.
^k Acts viii. 5, 6.

^h Acts viii. 4.

ⁱ Acts xi. 21.

We find Paul, soon after his miraculous conversion, exerting all the powers of reasoning and argument in the service of religion, “¹ proving,” to the confusion of the Jews at Damascus, “that Jesus was the “very Christ;” and “^m disputing against “the Grecians.”

“ⁿ Arise,” said Peter to the Paralytic Eneas, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. “And he arose immediately. And all that “dwelt at Lydda, and Saron, saw him, and “turned to the Lord.”

At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas “^o went “both together into the synagogue of the “Jews, and so spake that a great multitude “both of the Jews, and also of the Greeks, “believed.” And when “the Lord granted signs and wonders to be done by their “hands,” he is said hereby to have “^p given “testimony unto the word of his grace.” The inhabitants of Berea are justly applauded for their attention to scripture evidence,

C 2

¹ Acts ix. 22. ^m Acts ix. 29. ⁿ Acts ix. 32,
^o Acts xiv. 1. ^p Acts xiv. 3.

dence, and their diligent researches after it, which is assigned as the cause of their belief. “^q They searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so. Therefore “ many of them believed.” Paul “^r reasoned with the Thessalonians out of the “ scriptures;” and persuaded the Athenians, by “ arguments drawn from the works of nature, and the ways of providence. At “ Corinth he “ reasoned in the synagogue “ every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews “ and the Greeks.” And at “ Ephesus likewise “ he entered into the synagogue, and “ reasoned with the Jews.” Eloquence, joined to a deep knowledge of the scriptures, enabled Apollos “^w mightily to convince “ the Jews in Achaia, and that publicly, “ shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was “ Christ.” When Paul returned to Ephesus we find him again in the synagogue, “^x speaking boldly for the space of three “ months, disputing and persuading the “ things concerning the kingdom of God.”
Nay,

^q Acts xvii. 11. ^r Acts xvii. 2. ^s Acts xvii. 16, &c. ^t Acts xviii. 19. ^u Acts xviii. 19.
^v Acts xviii. 24, &c. ^x Acts xix. 8.

Nay, finding himself opposed in his ministry by some hardened unbelievers, he
 “^y disputed daily in the school of one Ty-
 “ rannus by the space of two years; so
 “ that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the
 “ word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and
 “ Greeks. And God wrought special mi-
 “ racles by the hands of Paul.” At Rome
 we find him alike indefatigable in “^z ex-
 “ pounding and testifying the kingdom of
 “ God to the Jews, persuading them con-
 “ cerning Jesus, both out of the law of
 “ Moses, and out of the prophets, from
 “ morning till evening.” And the historian
 leaves this great apostle before us, “^a preach-
 “ ing the kingdom of God to all that came
 “ in unto him, and teaching those things
 “ which concern the Lord Jesus Christ,
 “ with all confidence.”

Thus was evidence every where made the
 instrument of conversion in the hands of the
 apostles.

C 3

And

^y Acts xix. 9.
 xxviii. 31.

^z Acts xxviii. 23.

^a Acts

And to convey this evidence to all future ages, the history of our Saviour's life and miracles was recorded by the Evangelists. St. Luke thus addresses Theophilus : “ ^b It
 “ seemed good to me also, having had per-
 “ fect understanding of all things from the
 “ very first, to write unto thee in order,
 “ most excellent Theophilus, that thou
 “ mightest know the certainty of those
 “ things wherein thou hast been instructed.”
 In the same manner St. John thus explicitly declares the purpose of his writing.
 “ ^c These are written, that ye might believe
 “ that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
 “ and that believing ye might have life
 “ through his name.”

The sum of the argument is this. Our blessed Lord himself, his Fore-runner, his Apostles, and his Historians, all unite in carrying on the work of conversion by means of external evidence. Inasmuch that I believe we may safely assert, that there is not, in all the sacred history, the
 record

^b Luke i. 3.

^c John xx. 31.

record of one conversion wrought, in the manner that some would have us believe all conversions are made, by inward illumination.

Nay, the faith of the apostles themselves was established in the ordinary way, by outward evidence. For their conversion it was, and through them for the conversion of the whole world, that our Lord “^d shewed “ himself alive to them after his passion, by “ many infallible proofs.” “^e And he that “ saw it bare record, says St. John, and his “ record is true : and he knoweth that he “ faith true, that ye might believe.” The words of those who brought the first account of our Lord’s resurrection, seemed to the apostles as “^f idle tales, and they believed them not.” How was this unbelief overcome ? St. John tells us in his own case, as any other man would do, that he “^g saw “ and believed.” For their conviction it was that our Lord vouchsafed to “^h shew unto
C 4 “ them

^d Acts i. 3. ^e John xix. 35. ^f Luke xxvi.
11. ^g John xx. 8. ^h John xx. 20.

“ them his hands and his side.” And whenⁱ Thomas would not believe on the testimony of the other apostles, our Lord gave him that full evidence of his senses which he demanded. “ Thomas,” said he, “ reach
 “ hither thy finger, and behold my hands,
 “ and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it
 “ into my side ; and be not faithless, but
 “ believing.” When Thomas, overcome by this evidence, and melted by this condescension, broke out, in the language of true faith, into that exclamation, “ MY LORD,
 “ AND MY GOD :” “ Thomas,” replied our Lord, “ thou hast believed, because
 “ thou hast seen me : blessed are they that
 “ have not seen, and yet have believed.” This passage demands all our attention. Had faith sprung from any inward impression, Thomas might as well have believed before this sensible conviction, as after it. But he withheld his assent, till it was extorted from him by the evidence of his senses. Upon which our Lord’s remark is,
 “ Blessed are they that have not seen, and
 “ yet

ⁱ John xx. 14, &c.

“ yet have believed.” That is, “ The or-
 “ dinary means of blessing mankind with
 “ the knowledge of the Christian faith, will
 “ be by that evidence which thou hast re-
 “ fisted, the testimony of well informed
 “ witnesses : the evidence of sense is indeed
 “ given to a few, that they may be my
 “ chosen witnesses to the rest of the world ;
 “ but this kind of evidence cannot be im-
 “ parted to all ; the work of general con-
 “ version must be carried on by rational and
 “ historical evidence.” It must be acknow-
 ledged that this occurrence is extremely re-
 markable, and seems to have been disposed
 by our Lord on purpose to lay open to us, in
 one striking incident, the whole doctrine of
 the origin of faith.

If then this inward illumination did not
 take place even in the age of miracles, and
 in the times of the most plentiful effusions
 of the Holy Spirit, we can have no reason
 to expect it in these days, when his extra-
 ordinary communications are withdrawn.
 If it did not give birth to the Christian
 faith even in its first production, we can
 have

have no grounds to suppose it in the succession and continuance of it.

Thus is this doctrine established upon the fullest and clearest proof: a proof resting not upon some casual expression, which might be liable to various constructions, but upon a series of facts which cannot be mistaken; upon the uniform practice of our Lord and his apostles throughout their whole ministry. A proof of this nature can hardly leave room for any doubt or exception. We might safely therefore rest the matter here, were it not that this subject has been unhappily obscured, more perhaps than any other, by the number of unintelligible things that have been advanced concerning it. This will be my apology for offering some farther considerations in support of that plain and simple account of the origin of faith, which we have from the gospels.

Many observations to our purpose will arise from the nature of the human mind; the nature of that evidence by which the gospel is accompanied; and the nature of faith.

The

The Creator hath appointed stated ways of acting upon the mind, as well as upon the body. If we would excite belief in the mind, we reason, persuade, and prove. And we have no more doubt that belief will arise from conviction, than that motion will follow from impulse.

Our Saviour did not alter the nature of man, but dealt with him agreeably to what his Creator had made him. He sought access to the mind in the natural way, neither giving it any new powers, nor setting aside those which it originally possessed, nor introducing any change in its train of operations. When therefore he wanted to bring mankind to a faith in him as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, he did not leave this faith to be generated by some new and hidden communication within, but had recourse to the established method of argument, and external evidence. He poured conviction into the mind by that channel which the Creator had originally opened; passing through a series of unheard-of labours and distresses, voluntarily dying, that by returning in triumph from the grave, he might

might shew himself to be the Lord of life; and thus finish a proof, which all might understand, of his being sent by God.

The nature of this evidence is next to be considered.

The material world is always made subservient to the intellectual. The standing wonders of the creation prove a God, and an over-ruling providence. This was the basis of all religion as it stood in the original state of man. But after his fall from innocency, and the rights of the first covenant, the system of religion was to be changed. To this great change the regular course of nature could not bear witness. The heavens above, and the earth beneath, proclaimed to each other a Creator's power, and wisdom, and goodness. Thus far their language was clear and expressive. But it could go no farther. They could not tell the superior wonders of mercy that were to be displayed in the new dispensation. To authenticate this, and to shew that the giver of this dispensation was still the Lord of nature,

nature, it was necessary, that nature, with all her laws, should appear to be under his controul. The new revelation of God's will therefore was attested by many new appearances in nature. And thus were miracles introduced.

Accordingly we find them still employed to their original end of witnessing the truth of revelation. Wherever any new discovery of the will of heaven was made, it was still attested by miracles; and the power of working miracles devolved from prophet to prophet throughout the whole course of revelation. Let us lay all these wonders together, and weigh well that system of evidence by which the whole of revelation is supported. If we look back to Paradise, we see it first rising there, and springing up with revelation itself. Thence do their kindred streams flow on together, miracles still succeeding miracles, and the mighty tide of evidence encreasing as it descends through all future times. Behold the amazing pomp of wonders that surrounds mount Sinai, and by which the Mosaic dispensation was introduced! Behold
the

the grand but pleasing scene of miracles, displayed in the ministry of our Saviour and his apostles ; miracles all the offspring of benevolence and heavenly goodness, all suited to the spirit of that gospel which they accompanied ! In our own times behold, if not miracles, at least the manifest effect of miracles, which do not yet cease to operate. The Jewish people are preserved in a wonderful state of dispersion amongst all nations, to tell to all the world the miraculous production of their law ; and Christianity proves, by its very existence at this day, that the hand of Heaven must have guarded it in its infant and oppressed state. Behold all these miracles uniting in one design, interwoven with prophecies, and thus forming a system of evidence equally admirable for the symmetry, the just disposition, of the parts ; and the grandeur, extent, and harmony of the whole :—Behold all this, and then say to what end all this wonderful apparatus, this consent of all ages, this testimony of all nature, this concord of earth and heaven ; if not to produce faith, or a belief of Christianity by the power of evidence offered

ferred to our reason. Was this distribution of grand events throughout all ages no more than a vain ostentation of omnipotence, exhibited only to alarm and astonish the world, without serving any purpose of religion? Then indeed may we justly enquire, “to what purpose was all this waste “of the precious ointment made;” to what end all this profusion of the miraculous power? For if conviction in the believer’s mind be always produced by the immediate impression of the Holy Spirit, then are all the miracles, and all the records of them, at once rendered superfluous. The visible descent and appearance of the Holy Ghost on the apostles, with all those glorious demonstrations of “power from on high” that followed, might have been spared, if the world was to be converted, not by the visible and public operations of the Spirit, but by its inward and secret impressions working conviction in the mind of every individual. And we must remark upon our Lord’s miracles in general, that if they were not intended for the conviction of mankind, their noblest end is destroyed.

Bene-

Beneficent as they were, we see but half their lustre, if we consider them only as so many prescriptions to relieve a few individuals from bodily pain, and not as the perpetual means of extending salvation through all future ages.

Farther. Where there is an established cause, manifest to all the world, fixed, permanent, and regular in its action, it were contrary to all order and analogy, to all the known proceedings of God, either in the world of matter, or the world of spirits, to suppose the effect to be produced by another latent, and concealed, cause. Now we have the strongest established evidence for our faith in Christ. Shall then conviction, the natural effect of evidence, be supposed in this case to proceed from some other cause? Where one adequate cause of the effect appears, another supposed and doubtful cause will not readily be admitted. Where evidence, the universal cause of conviction, undeniably exists, it should seem to require an additional miracle to prevent the effect, rather than to produce it. In short,
either

either the natural or the spiritual miracle must be unnecessary. We are sure that the natural miracle doth exist; we must therefore suppose that the spiritual doth not.

Why hath God given us minds moveable by the weight of evidence, and why hath he prepared the evidence suited to move us, if nothing is to result from this correspondence?

The mind is moved by every inferior evidence in every lower concern, and can it be supposed to be unmoved by the highest evidence in the most important cause?

When we see the strongest external evidence applied, and to all appearance conviction arising in the mind of the believer from the force of the evidence, it is strange to say still that this conviction arises from an inward illumination. It is as if when we see the seal applied to the wax, we should still insist, that the impression was not stamped by the seal, but was formed by some inward motion of the wax.

D

“Ye

“Ye believe in God,” says our Saviour, “believe also in me.” The works of creation give us proofs of a God; the works of revelation in like manner prove a Redeemer. They who assert that faith in a Redeemer arises from an inward impression, notwithstanding the outward evidence fitted to produce it; may with equal appearance of truth and reason say, that the belief of a God likewise arises from an inward impression, notwithstanding the evidence that all creation bears to this truth.

If we go on to consider the nature of faith itself, we shall still see farther reasons to conclude that it cannot have this origin. Consciousness indeed belongs to faith, as it does to every other act of the mind. When we have faith, we must feel that we have it: but faith itself can never be a feeling, nor the effect of any feeling. Faith implies a belief of many facts: as that the Son of God came down from heaven, died, and rose again for us. It does not seem easy to conceive how we can have an in-ward

ward feeling of the reality of these facts, if we set aside the history of them and its evidence. If it could be conceived, the operation would still seem unnecessary, because intended only to effect what the history, together with its evidence, is able to effect without it.

We must believe the history of prophecies and miracles, ere we can believe our Saviour's divine mission. We must believe our Saviour's divine mission, ere we can believe his revelations concerning redemption and a future state. This is the natural and necessary order. Let those then, who imagine that their faith in a Redeemer is an immediate divine impression, consider, whether they did in reality conceive this faith, without any belief of the previous articles, and entirely independent of them. Let one instance be produced of faith in a Redeemer, where the history of redemption was not first known. Where the means of producing faith are applied, to suppose that the faith arises from a new miracle, is to suppose

that the means are insufficient: that the miracles and prophecies are not well attested: that they are not sufficient to prove our Saviour's divine mission: or his divine mission being proved, that we have not sufficient grounds to believe what he hath revealed to us.

To set aside the outward object in the production of faith, and to say that it arises entirely from within, independent of any power or impression of outward evidence, is to introduce into religion that theory, alike admired and rejected, which hath been applied to sensation. God may indeed, by an act of his creative power, excite faith in the mind without its suitable evidence, as he may stamp upon it the images of things without the application of a material world. This cannot be denied. Yet still, for the same reasons that we believe matter to exist out of the mind, we must believe faith to have its outward object likewise.

Thus do the nature of the human mind,
the nature of gospel evidence, and the na-
ture

ture of faith itself, all conspire to support that account of the origin of faith, which we have in the gospels.

The same observations may be applied to that other office of inward illumination, which our modern pretenders to inspiration lay claim to, of guiding and directing them in the practice of religion, and in the ways of life. For this interferes with that outward and established rule of life, which heaven has laid before us in the holy scriptures, as the other does with the established evidence.

It will hardly be maintained that all these pretended inward feelings and illuminations are true and of divine original. Some have been confessedly delusive, and the parents of most diabolical errors. How then are the true to be distinguished from the delusive? There is no other way but by comparing them with the word of God. If their suggestions be repugnant to that word, they must be false. If consonant to it, they may indeed be true, but must seem

unnecessary, because they teach us nothing but what that word would teach us without their help. Thus does every consideration bring us back to that word of God, which was given us for our instruction in all divine truth.—If it be said that these inward suggestions are supplemental to the word of God, and therefore not unnecessary; it must first be proved that revelation is incomplete, and that we have room to expect new revelations. Would they prove that they have been favoured with these new revelations; let them produce any article of faith, any rule either of belief or practice, which they have learnt by that means, and which we do not as clearly learn from the written word of God.

The method of inspiration, or inward impression, was indeed necessary, in the case of the apostles, to lead them into all truth, because their information could come only from heaven. But when they had received the heavenly gift of truth, and had provided for its conveyance to all the world by their teaching, and by the records of truth which they left for the use
of

of all mankind, it was no longer necessary that others should be instructed in the same manner. The business of inspiration was now fully answered, and the world was henceforth to learn that truth, from the written word of God, which the apostles had composed from the dictates of the Spirit. The Spirit led the apostles into all truth for no other end, than that they might lead all the rest of the world into the same heavenly light. To say that all Christians are still to be led into all truth immediately by the Spirit, is rendering the designation of the apostles of none effect. Since there can be no need of their interposition to convey the truths of revelation, if we may learn them by a more compendious way.

God indeed fed man with angel's food: but it was in a wilderness, where there was no natural food. But no sooner did his chosen people come into a land flowing with milk and honey, than this miraculous supply ceased, and they were left to be fed by the bounteous hand of nature. Such is the case of Christians. The miraculous

powers, and extraordinary illuminations of the Holy Spirit, were necessary at first, to introduce a religion new to the world, and superior to reason ; but as soon as by means of these Christianity was established, and the volume of scriptures compleated, we were thenceforward left to be guided by the common and established means.

But — whilst we “ pluck up the tares,” let us beware of “ plucking up the wheat “ also.” I am sensible, that the subject requires to be managed with delicacy and discretion ; and that this free attempt to expose the errors of enthusiasm, may be regarded by some, as a want of respect for the doctrines of our church. But God forbid that truth and error should be so unhappily complicated and interwoven with each other, at least in points of this importance, as that the veneration due to the sacred character of truth should be any sanction for falsehood ; or should restrain us from speaking in the freest manner, our disapprobation of it. However, to guard against all suspicion, it may be necessary to trace out those limits which
clearly

clearly divide the pure doctrines of our church, and of scripture, from the errors we have been speaking of; and to point out, in a few words, where the distinction lies between the extravagant pretensions of enthusiasm, and that influence of the Holy Spirit without which we acknowledge that all our best abilities are impotence; our wisdom darkness and folly.

The Enthusiast then claims more than even the apostles themselves enjoyed. For he claims not only to be led by the Spirit, as they were, into all truth; but likewise to be endued with faith by the Spirit alone, without the help of evidence: a privilege which, we have seen, the apostles never claimed.

If these pretensions then are carried too far, which I suppose will readily be admitted, the question will be, how the influence of the Holy Spirit is limited; what we may reasonably expect from it; and how, in short, his ordinary assistance is distinguished from his extraordinary. By his

his extraordinary inspiration, he taught the divinely commissioned preachers of religion, all those sacred truths which they were to publish to the world; and enabled them to prove their commission by prophecies and miracles. Does he still inspire those truths which he gave the apostles to publish? Does he still work conviction without that evidence which he himself fitted out? In a word, do the private operations of the heavenly Inspirer set aside his public? — This cannot be the case. We may be sure that his operations are all consistent; and so far from counter-acting, that they all concur with, and mutually support each other. Whenever therefore his ordinary influences are carried so far, as plainly to interfere with his extraordinary, we may be sure that they are carried to excess. He does not give again in secret that evidence, or that light for our guidance in religion, which he had before publicly given. His private gifts are only such as may aid and promote the effects of his public.

These

These principles, than which nothing can be more plain and undeniable, give us, with great precision, that line by which the ordinary influences of the Spirit are every where bounded. For they can be no more than supplemental to the extraordinary. And therefore the extent of his public operations, which is well known and clearly defined, will in all cases limit the extent of the private.

It follows, that he does not act upon us merely by inward illumination, independently either of those powers of the mind which the Creator hath bestowed upon us, or of those outward means of conviction which he himself hath established. He invigorates all the faculties of the soul, but acts only in concurrence with them, and by the intervention of outward and established means. Far from demanding a sacrifice of our own abilities, or from rendering them unnecessary, he calls for the utmost exertion of them. He strengthens the understanding, prompts and bends the will; but he does by no means enlighten the understanding, or move the will, independently

dependently of the common revelation. He enforces the impresson of the evidence upon the mind; casts an heavenly radiance round those truths which have been revealed, and aids the effect of those motives upon the will which revelation sets before us.

The Creator hath fitted out our bodies in a curious manner for receiving and digesting food, and turning it to nourishment. But still the body cannot sustain itself, nor would this food turn to nourishment, without the divine blessing and support. So it is with the soul. The divine assistance is necessary to its encrease and nourishment; but the soul too has its food as well as the body, its outward means of nourishment by which the blessing acts.

Our Saviour, even in his miracles, made use of the powers of nature. When he restored sight to the blind, he did not strike an inward light in the eye itself; but vision was still excited, in the way that the Creator at first established, by the common light of the sun. So when the world

was

was to be converted, he did not dart an inward illumination into the mind of every individual: it was sufficient that he established for the use of all, AN EVIDENCE EQUAL TO THE SUN IN BRIGHTNESS.

I cannot conclude without adding a few words concerning the evil tendency of the opinion we have been considering, especially in places, like this, dedicated to the united service of religion and learning.

If reason is excluded from all share in forming and conducting the principles of our faith; if the whole work of religion is supposed to be carried on by some concealed operations within, in which we are entirely passive, having nothing to do but to obey the secret impulse; how unfavourable an influence must this doctrine shed on all the business of this place! Alas, how degraded must all the functions of reason appear, when thus divorced from virtue, her noblest companion: and how mean, how trifling, all her labours, when they are no longer conceived to have any tendency to promote the only real business of
this

this life, our preparation for a better! If opinions of this kind once come to prevail amongst us, like an unkindly damp they must chill all the powers of the mind. For what is there, what can there be, to excite or call her forth to action, now that her highest encouragement, her fairest palm of honour, is snatched from her? Farewel then all efforts of genius, all generous emulation in the race of glory! Farewel all thirst of knowledge, all culture of polite literature, or useful science; all that can adorn or improve the mind, farewel: and welcome, in their stead, monkish ignorance and barbarism! The mind, abandoned to the guidance of a fancied inspiration, runs into all the wilds of enthusiasm: there all neglected and melancholy it wanders; haunted by dark and gloomy visions; deserted by itself; and lost to every thing that is rational, manly, and truly noble. All human learning will be reckoned profane and heathenish, and will be supposed to vitiate and debauch the mind, instead of improving it. Reason itself will be regarded with a jealous eye, as the rival
of

of true religion. These noble structures, which have been through ages sacred to learning, will be esteemed the temples of a vain idol ; and all our studies, idolatry.

But, on the other hand, if reason, when duly employed, be under the conduct and blessing of the Holy Spirit ; how must our confidence in this heavenly support bear us up under all the toils of study ! Cherished by this warmth from heaven, the human mind will attain to its full maturity. This consideration stamps a new dignity on the meanest of our labours ; and human learning is ennobled by its alliance with divine. Every art of reasoning, every exercise of the mind, will be regarded as a discipline to prepare us for actions truly worthy of our ambition ; and whilst we give strength and activity to the understanding in the schools, we shall be considered as training it up for the service of God. Then will the champion of religion come laden with spoils gathered from every field of science, to enter upon the sacred ground. There, with all the united powers of reason and learning, he will maintain his cause,
against

this life, our preparation for a better! If opinions of this kind once come to prevail amongst us, like an unkindly damp they must chill all the powers of the mind. For what is there, what can there be, to excite or call her forth to action, now that her highest encouragement, her fairest palm of honour, is snatched from her? Farewel then all efforts of genius, all generous emulation in the race of glory! Farewel all thirst of knowledge, all culture of polite literature, or useful science; all that can adorn or improve the mind, farewell: and welcome, in their stead, monkish ignorance and barbarism! The mind, abandoned to the guidance of a fancied inspiration, runs into all the wilds of enthusiasm: there all neglected and melancholy it wanders; haunted by dark and gloomy visions; deserted by itself; and lost to every thing that is rational, manly, and truly noble. All human learning will be reckoned profane and heathenish, and will be supposed to vitiate and debauch the mind, instead of improving it. Reason itself will be regarded with a jealous eye, as the rival
of

of true religion. These noble structures, which have been through ages sacred to learning, will be esteemed the temples of a vain idol ; and all our studies, idolatry.

But, on the other hand, if reason, when duly employed, be under the conduct and blessing of the Holy Spirit ; how must our confidence in this heavenly support bear us up under all the toils of study ! Cherished by this warmth from heaven, the human mind will attain to its full maturity. This consideration stamps a new dignity on the meanest of our labours ; and human learning is ennobled by its alliance with divine. Every art of reasoning, every exercise of the mind, will be regarded as a discipline to prepare us for actions truly worthy of our ambition ; and whilst we give strength and activity to the understanding in the schools, we shall be considered as training it up for the service of God. Then will the champion of religion come loaden with spoils gathered from every field of science, to enter upon the sacred ground. There, with all the united powers of reason and learning, he will maintain his cause,
against

against enthusiasm on the one hand, and infidelity on the other: and will establish the evidence and the principles of his religion on their proper basis; on that rock, against which no enemy shall ever prevail. Then will true religion and useful learning flourish together. Then will all our studies tend at once to the glory of God, and to the honour of human nature. Then will our religion be truly “a reasonable service;” and then may we be said to worship God, not only in SPIRIT, but also in TRUTH.

F I N I S.



Published by the same Author.

The Force of the Argument for the Truth of Christianity drawn from a collective View of Prophecy. The second Edition, Price 1s. 6d.

An Apology for the Athanasian Creed. The second Edition. Price 1s. 6d.

A Sermon on the Wisdom of Providence in the Administration of the World, preached before the University of Oxford on the Anniversary of His Majesty's Inauguration, Oct. 25, 1762. Published at the Request of the Vice-Chancellor and Heads of Houses. Price 1s.

Speedily will be published, A second Edition of a Sketch of the one great Argument formed from the several concurring Evidences for the Truth of Christianity.

ni-
nd
di-
ni-
of
on,
ce-
tch
on-

